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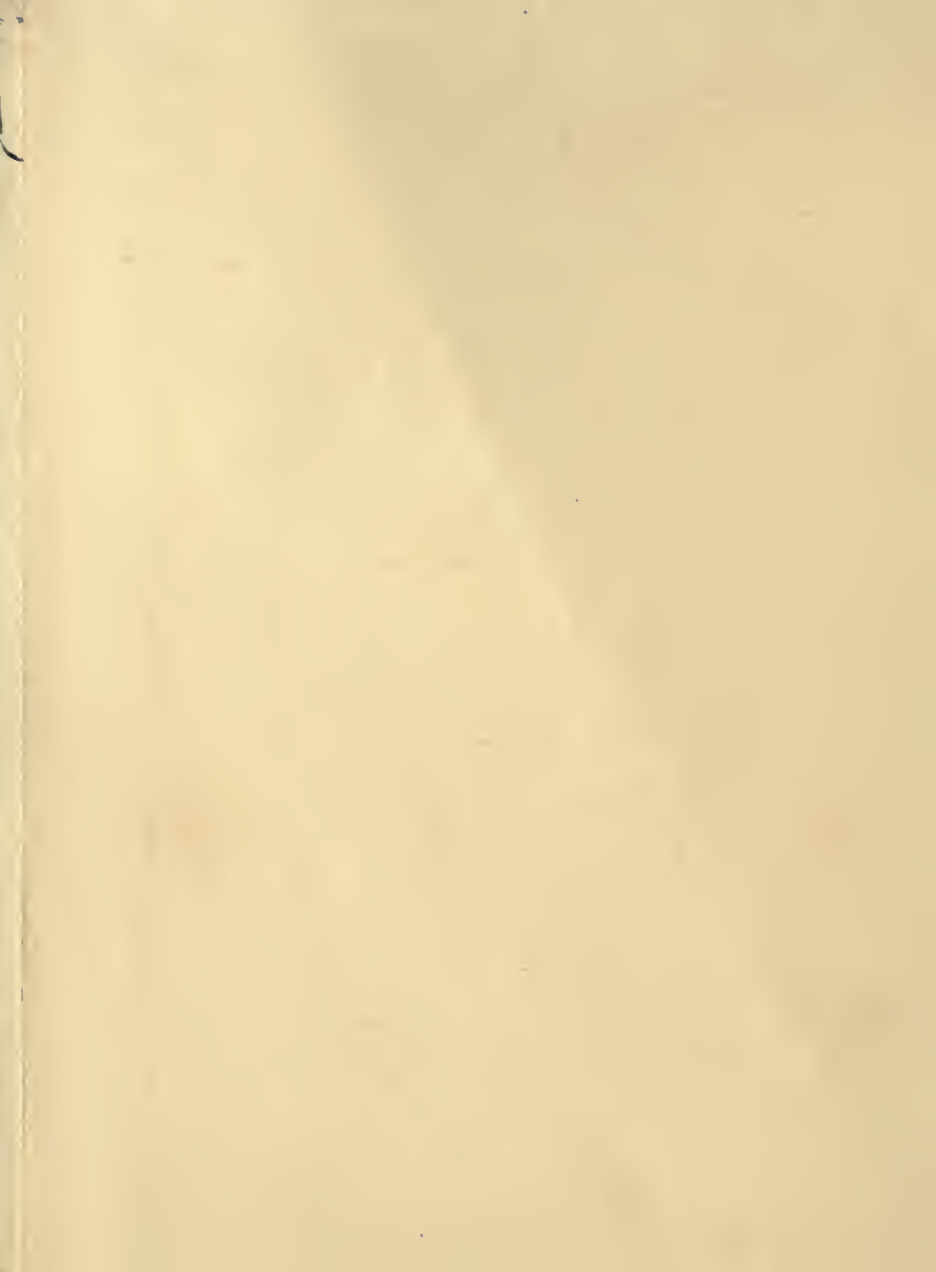
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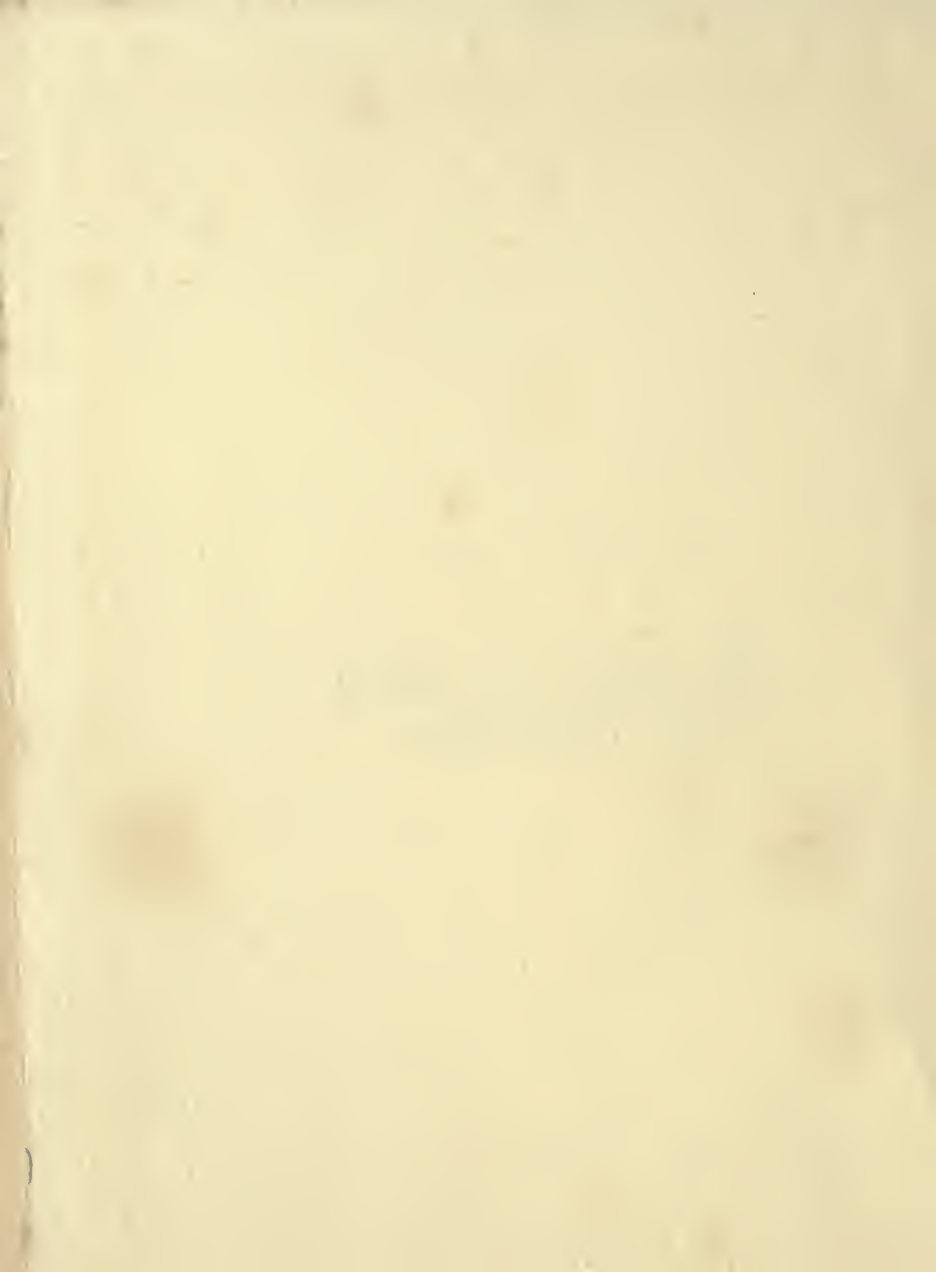
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THE QUEST OF TRUTH  
AND OTHER POEMS





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*One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed though right were worsted, wrong would triumph.  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake.*

ROBERT BROWNING.

FOR REVIEW.

# THE QUEST OF TRUTH AND OTHER POEMS

BY

H. REX FRESTON

*(Killed in action in France, January 24th, 1916)*

*Author of 'The Quest of Beauty and other Poems'*

Orford

B. H. BLACKWELL, BROAD STREET

1916

WINDSOR 807

## NOTE

Most of the poems in this book have been written during the past six months. My best thanks are due to the Editor of *The Times*, and the Editor of *The Daily Mirror*, for permission to reprint certain of them.

H. REX FRESTON.

WINDSOR,  
*November, 1915.*

## To My Mother\*

To you, all times the same and never old,  
I give this book, in hopes that you may find  
Some pleasing song to treasure in your mind,  
Some tender thought within your heart to fold.

And though among these pages there may be  
Strange dreams of mine, that now shall make you sad,  
' Here he was troubled when I deemed him glad,'  
' Here is a sorrow which he kept from me ; '

Yet grieve not, dearest, for your little son :  
New loves might change, but yours was always true ;  
When all men failed him he returned to you,  
And there found all, for you are all in one.

*\* These lines, written on a leaf torn from a notebook, are backed by a hasty note to his Mother :—*

10 p.m., Wednesday (1912).

DEAREST MOTHER,

I am afraid I wrote this in the middle of doing my logic for to-morrow. Never mind. Don't shew it to anybody, for heaven's sake, but I shall put it in the front of my first book of verse, and may get it printed alone in some paper first, perhaps in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, or the *Athenæum*.

Now goodbye, dear,

(back to the grindstone),

Best love as ever,

From REX.

## PREFACE

Hugh Reginald Freston (Rex) was born on July 25th, 1891, at Tulse Hill, in the County of Surrey, and educated at Dulwich College. In October, 1912, he became an Undergraduate at Exeter College, Oxford, with a view to taking holy orders eventually. Very soon, however, he abandoned his former intention, and decided to follow the pursuit of literature, and especially that of poetry. At the time the War broke out he was reading for his B.A. degree in the Honours School of English Literature, but feeling it his duty to leave the life he loved, for that of a soldier, he joined the O.T.C., and was given a commission as 2nd Lieutenant in the 3rd Royal Berkshire Regiment (Special Reserve of Officers). Quickly adapting himself with ready unselfishness and even enthusiasm to a life for which he had no real inclination, he yet found time to write his poems, even amidst the uncongenial surroundings of barrack and camp life, where a life of action ever took precedence to that of thought, and where it was difficult to find the quiet solitude that he loved.

In December, 1915, he went to the front, and after some weeks' preliminary waiting entered the trenches with his Company, and after a short period of only ten days he was 'killed in action' on January 24th, 1916. The next evening he was buried by the Chaplain in the new military 'Grave Garden,' which in peace time would be a beautiful wooded spot near to an old chateau 'somewhere in France.' It is thought that one of his later poems referred to this very spot.

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE RECTOR OF HIS COLLEGE WRITES:

'I pray it may be of some consolation to you to remember how gallantly your son offered his life for the greatest of causes, and how well he was appreciated in life by those who knew him. I am glad to think that I was one of those who recognised and enjoyed his high poetic gift and charm. It is infinitely sad that so promising and gifted a life should be lost before the harvest was realised.'

## To H. Rex Freston

*(Killed in action in France, January 24th, 1916.)*

OUR ways have never crossed, and yet,  
    Though now our hands may never meet,  
I feel the sorrow of regret  
    Lie darkly on the written sheet.

For I a privilege have known  
    That granted unto few has been—  
The things that from your verse have grown,  
    Your last rare thoughts my eyes have seen.

And I have read the splendid lines,  
    And understood the dauntless soul,  
That sought and held all things Divine  
    And wrought them to a perfect whole.

Silent your song, yet while you sung  
    You voiced your heart as one inspired  
And dared to cry with fearless tongue  
    The faith that all your being fired.

With conquered doubt and courage high,  
With prophet eyes you faced the sun,  
Armed from within could death defy !  
You fought, and fighting fell—and won !

I will not ask why you should go,  
Or whence this sudden grief and pain,  
But this undying truth I know—  
You have not lived or died in vain.

From out the shadow of your doom  
You raise a lamp with steadfast flame,  
That burns with light transcending gloom  
To lead us on to your fair fame !

RUSSELL MARKLAND.  
( "*R. M. Ingersley.*" )

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## FOREWORD

### THE POETS.

*For us who have to find the way  
And prove the unguessed at, the unknown,  
How hardly shall our hearts have peace  
While yet we pace the night alone !*

*For sometimes, like a star will flash  
From truth's dim skies a far-off gleam :  
And many the fruitless voyage we make,  
Discovering but an empty dream.*

*Ah ! we who seek the hidden light,  
How often shall our eyes mistake  
The evil for the good—and feel  
The cords of safety bend and break.*

*But still a discontent divine  
Shall spoil our rest and urge us on ;  
And still, unloved, the night we pace ;  
And each of us must go alone.*



*Doubt.*



## THE QUEST OF TRUTH.

WHAT'S to be done with this sick old world ?  
Can't we all ever agree ?  
And here am I,  
To-day, in an old top coat, with a cold in my head,  
In front of the dining room fire ;  
(Last leave home !)  
To-morrow, may be, with a bayonet stuck in my skull,  
Dead in a German trench !  
Damn it all, what for ?

\* \* \* \*

LET's suppose that I *am* dead ;  
Does it matter much to you ?  
Not so much—if overhead  
Dawns the spring's first blue !

Early crocus in the woods,  
Pink and green lights in the sky ;  
Sleeping earth, with opening eyelids,  
Heaves her first long sigh.

Then suppose that someone young,  
Slim, and fresh as April dawn,  
Lashes your wild heart to madness,  
Leaving you forlorn.

In the time of love and spring,  
Flower, and bird, and early blue,  
Though I moulder in a trench  
Will it sorrow you ?

\* \* \* \*

SUPPOSE, as some have done, I had made excuse,  
I, who am poor.  
Suppose I had sought seclusion in the dim far lands of exile,  
Over the leagues of foam ;  
And there in warmth and safety, far from the din and roar,  
Had built me another home !  
Surely, had I done this, in the dark still hours of night,  
I should have woke from sleep, with my soul in great affright,  
Hearing the cry of innocent blood,  
From over the eastern wave,  
Voices of little children,  
That I could, but would not save.

\* \* \* \*

JESUS *always* spoke the truth  
"It's not done," you say ;  
"The best people," you assure me,  
"Don't behave that way."

Jesus was a man of peace ;  
"But it is not done ;  
"The new Christ must wear a helmet,  
"In His hand a gun."

\* \* \* \*

AND first I sang a song of war :  
And all the people held it good :  
Until the staff I thought was wood,  
He showed it was but made of straw.

For He an earthly empire scorns ;  
He has no lust for wealth and lands,  
An olive branch is in His hands,  
And on His head a crown of thorns.

The workman with his brad and awl,  
He is not welcome to the feast :  
They count him little more than beast,  
And keep him waiting in the hall.

Yet every day each nation dares  
    Invoke his aid in bloody strife.  
    Each fearing greatly for its life,  
Five nations offer up their prayers.

\* \* \* \*

“WHAT is truth ?” said jesting Pilate.  
He indeed might ask :  
Each of us might “ask” ; but “answer”  
Is a different task.

Is it health, or wealth, or beauty ?  
Pleasure, sorrow, pain ?  
Individual bliss or duty ?  
Self or other's gain ?

\* \* \* \*

SURELY there are many notions ;  
    Many banners are unfurled :  
And their disagreement causes  
    All the trouble in the world.

Seek the truth ! Though oft mistaken,  
    Laughed at, mocked at, you may fall :  
Better die a faithful failure,  
    Than not to have dared at all.

OCTOBER 31st, 1915.

IT is the last morning of October !  
And the wind hisses among the ragged leaves ;  
The trees look shabby and cold.  
The window-pane is splashed all over with rain drops ;  
And raindrops run down like tears on the ivy's face,  
Pause a moment, and fall.

\* \* \* \*

WHERE is everybody ? What are they doing ?  
Are they walking about in the rain ?  
The sound of the church bells is blown about on the wind,  
Now loud ; now low ;  
Very far ; suddenly, strangely near ; and very far again :  
A lot of people must be going to church—  
I don't like the way people look at you as you go in,  
It makes me feel so uncomfortable.

\* \* \* \*

OUT in France, a lot of men are standing in the trenches,  
Most of them are wearing old caps.  
And their unshaved faces are half hidden in dirty mufflers.  
They all look very ugly, and are cursing the rain—  
In a week or two I shall be out there with them—  
What will happen if I never come back again ?

\* \* \* \*

It is most annoying that I shall not have time to express  
myself,

Owing to this war,

I shall not have time to make people angry with me for  
telling the truth,

O those respectable people! Those well-to-do, smug, self-  
satisfied men and women!

How daintily, finely they dress! Their voices are most  
refined.

But it would be splendid to take all their money away,

And make them live on eighteen shillings a week,

And work for it!

\* \* \* \*

After I am dead,

And have become part of the soil of France,

This much remember of me:

I was a great sinner, a great lover, and life puzzled me very  
much.

Ah love! I would have died for love!

Love can do so much, both rightly and wrongly.

It remembers mothers, and little children,

And lots of other things.

O men unborn, I go now, my work unfinished!

I pass on the problem to you: the world will hate you:  
be brave!

## THE SINNER.

I DREAMED I sat by heaven's gate,  
And watched the good men go  
All comfortless in robes of white,  
That had no stain to show.

For, fearing greatly, they on earth  
Scarce dared to draw a breath  
—Their single talent still unused—  
And now their life was death.

Then I descended to the depth,  
And watched the sinners go,  
With faces shining like the day,  
And scarlet robes aglow.

And there among them as of old  
Walked One, whom I knew well,  
Who opened wide His arms to me :  
I found my Christ in hell.



*War.*



## THE DEAR BABIES.

I THINK how God must laugh to see us play  
At being soldiers, at being great and bold.  
—With all Infinity in which to stray—  
While we men squabble for an inch of mould.  
Lying on the invisible clouds, He props His head  
Upon His elbows, and looks amusedly down,  
And barely sees us ants, all lying dead  
Besides the little puny flaming town.

And then He whistles : and our souls one by one  
Fly up, crowd all about Him, but with shame,  
Like schoolboys found out at some senseless play :  
And so God laughs, and kisses us in fun,  
And pointing with His finger's burning flame  
To heaven's bright play-grounds, bids us rush away.

## TO THE ARMY.

YOUR cold perfection as of steel,  
Your beauty as a great machine,  
We know: but you do not reveal  
The deathless flame that burns within.

We talk so much of sacrifice ;  
You do your duty ; do we guess  
Behind those scornful, fearless eyes,  
The hidden dreams of tenderness ?

Not less than ours your ideals are :  
But where cold truth and fancy meet,  
With eyes upon the distant star,  
You crush the dream beneath your feet.

Your cold perfection as of steel,  
Your beauty as a great machine,  
We know: but you do not reveal  
The deathless flame that burns within.

*Lines written upon a statue of Nelson which stands on  
the high hills overlooking Portsmouth Harbour.*

HIGH on the lone chalk ridges,  
Above the quiet farmlands,  
There like a distant beacon  
The lonely statue stands.

Below, down in the harbour,  
With slow and solemn pride,  
"The *Victory*," at anchor,  
Swings round with every tide.

And whether from the Solent  
Or far off Selsey Bill,  
The sailor coming homeward sees  
The sign upon the hill.

Nelson, they fain would crown thee  
In London's central roar ;  
Far from the old flagship  
And the familiar shore.

Here by the sea's deep music  
And the nightwind's moan,  
As once thy great soul stood aloof  
Thy statue stands alone.

Alone with the few things dearly loved ;  
The old ship and the breeze,  
The sword of high adventure  
And the dark forbidding seas.

\* \* \* \*

And let them come in the midnight,  
Or in the bright noonday ;  
They shall find him there before them  
And spoiling for the fray.

Still on the lone chalk ridges  
The patient watcher stands ;  
With England's pride and honour  
Safe in his fearless hands.

## KING AND COUNTRY.

FORTY million Englishmen  
Calm, and grave, and true ;  
See we stand by moor and fen,  
Waiting orders what to do.

Some with gun and some with pen,  
Hit a nail or turn a screw,  
Forty million Englishmen,  
Each his work will do.

Forty million Englishmen  
We are not a few ;  
Tell us only where and when,  
We will show our love for you.

## O FORTUNATI.

O HAPPY to have lived these epic days !

To have seen unfold, as doth a dream unfold,  
These glorious chivalries, these deeds of gold,  
The glory of whose splendour gilds death's ways,  
As a rich sunset fills dark woods with fire

And blinds the traveller's eyes. Our eyes *are* blind  
With flaming heroism, that leaves our mind  
Dumbstruck with pride. We have had our heart's desire !  
O happy ! Generations have lived and died

And only dreamed such things as we have seen and known !  
Splendour of men, death laughed at, death defied,  
Round the great world, on the winds, their tale is blown ;  
Whatever pass, these ever shall abide :

In memory's Valhalla, an imperishable throne.

## YOUTH'S FREEDOM.

AND now at last the old tyranny is fled,  
That held and chained youth in its mouldering chains ;  
That bound young hearts behind dull window panes,  
Chilled noble blood, and bowed the eager head  
To stoop o'er dusty ledgers : all this is done,  
And youth is free again, and Youth is glad  
To breathe the heavens once more ; and Youth is mad  
With the wild rapture of the wind and sun.  
Who could have urged so glorious a dream  
To find acceptance in the statesman's brain,  
That he should undo the bolts, and show the stream  
Of golden daylight, rushing wind, wild rain,  
The broad moist fields, great hills, and stars that gleam,  
And give Youth back his freedom once again ?

## ADVENTURE.

LET me go on. I cannot bide and stay  
As others do beneath familiar skies,  
Ever content. My spirit bids me rise  
And track the unknown, however far away.  
I must go on,—and while it yet is day,  
Adventure the high mountainous path that lies  
Upon the horizon—till it fades and dies  
In the blue mists and far-flung shadows grey.  
Strange cities and strange faces call to me :  
Vast domes and steeples, flushed with crimson bars  
Of sunset ; forests murmuring like the sea ;  
Glitter of arms, tumult of distant wars :  
And broad flower-laden fields laid witchingly  
Neath violet skies and bright mysterious stars.

## ON GOING INTO ACTION.

Now the weak impulse and the blind desire  
    Give way at last to the all-conquering will.  
    Love now must pause, and fancy cease, until  
The soul has won that freedom born of fire.  
Sing, then, no songs upon the sweet-voiced lyre :  
    But choose some nobler instrument, whose shrill  
    Nerve-bracing notes, my doubting heart shall fill  
With a new courage, that will never tire.  
Sing me the dead men's glorious deeds again !  
    Tell how they suffered, died, but would not fail !  
Stir me to action ! Let me feel their pain,  
    Their strength, their mystery : that at the tale  
I rise with such clear purpose in my brain  
    That even Hell's own gates should not prevail.



*Sorrow.*



TO A. M.

*(Killed in Flanders).*

Now you are dead, I dare not read  
That letter that you sent to me  
Before you went : my heart would bleed  
If I that writing now should see.

For I should dream how, long ago,  
We walked those careless Oxford ways,  
When Cherwell's banks were all aglow  
With hawthorn and with reddening mays.

And see, as once I used to see,  
St. Mary's spire against the sky :  
And hear you laugh and call to me,  
As I came slowly up the High.

## THE MESS TABLE.

SOMETIMES, above the talk and wine  
That round the long white table flow,  
There fall upon my startled ears,  
The voices that I used to know.

And looking round the lighted room,  
Each in his own familiar chair,  
With laughing eyes that greet my eyes,  
I see the dead men sitting there.

The dead men's faces glow and shine  
With jest and laughter as of old ;  
The dead men's voices come and go ;  
And yet my heart is strangely cold.

For one long moment they remain :  
And then, as through a mist, I see  
The new men sitting in the chairs,  
Where once the dead men used to be.

## TWO NIGHTS.

I LISTENED to the bugles, and I hearkened to the bells  
In old Oxford city, a night long, long ago :  
O the bells were full of music, like the sound of fountain wells,  
But the others played a music, I never thought to know.

There's a lilt of martial music and a cry of fountain wells,  
In the barrack square to-night, beneath the lonely tree :  
And I laugh to hear the bugles, but I weep to hear the bells ;  
For I know the bells of Oxford will ring no more for me.

## THE PICNIC.

(*To E. M. F.*)

IN a certain wood in South England,  
Not far from the busy town,  
In the soft autumn weather,  
When the leaves come tumbling down,

You know we went together,  
And the fields were all aglow,  
To picnic in the old wood,  
Ever so long ago.

I was a schoolboy then, dear,  
So wise with the things I knew ;  
And you let me go on talking,  
As mothers always do.

The world has changed since then, dear,  
And lots of the things I planned,  
Must still go on sleeping  
In the old, dear, wise dreamland.

For much in the world is discord,  
And the golden wheels of life  
Are clogged with man's contention,  
And his fierce angry strife.

But out of the world's uproar,  
Often I steal alone  
Into that old forest,  
Where the leaves are lightly blown.

To the old wood in South England,  
While the south winds softly blow,  
Where once we made our picnic,  
Ever so long ago.

## MEMORY.

(*To E. M. F.*).

I THOUGHT to be with you, when you are old ;  
I longed to be with you, when you are old ;  
Dearest, it seems we did not understand.

But now the sound of marching fills the street :  
The sound of marching shakes the quiet street ;  
Dearest, it seems we did not understand.

And I must go, and journey far away ;  
Yes, I must journey very far away :  
Dearest, it seems we did not understand.

And yet, I think we somehow understand ;  
We know not how, and yet we understand ;  
I *shall* be with you, dear, when you are old.

## LOVE'S SHADOW.

THERE was sunshine that day in the garden,  
And all the world was fair ;  
When one passed by singing,  
And left a shadow there.

O he passed by singing,  
And he was very fair ;  
And he went on his way singing ;  
But he left a shadow there.

There is sunshine still in the garden,  
And still the world is fair :  
But for one, who holds his secret,  
The shadow is ever there.

TO ———.

OH, you were very real to me !  
A shadow unto some you were,  
A pale grey shadow wandering there :  
But unto me you were most real.

And now, whenever lips I see,  
Like to your lips, eyes like your eyes,  
Or hair like yours, then do I feel  
A sorrow, not unlike the pain  
Of those old days.

Then eyes that never smiled on me  
Are full of love ; and hands that drew  
Away from mine are near and dear ;  
While words I dreamed should never be,  
Fall from your lips—and you are there !  
And you are there, and come to me.

## RENUNCIATION.

NOT always do I find myself complain  
Against this harsh new order of the day,  
Where we must put the old loved things away  
And rise up to embrace new toil and pain.  
For amongst much of loss there lies much gain :  
We have learned new strength, from learning to obey  
Necessity ; and hearts that used to stray,  
Often too selfishly, are kind again.  
Yet oftentimes to me there cometh one,  
With sorrow in his eyes, whom half I know :  
Who loved to paint the flowers and the sun,  
In gentle language, musically slow :  
Who grieves to leave his life-work scarce begun,  
Who hoped so much, but now must turn and go.

## OCTOBER.

Now is the yellow autumn sunlight lying  
With a deep peace on this October noon  
Upon the trees, as if on earth a swoon  
Had fallen from heaven ; while somewhere comes a sighing  
A phantom melody, a distant crying,  
The voice of Nature weeping in a tune  
Old as the mountains on the cold white moon  
Because of summer, because of summer dying.  
And vivid pictures fill my mind : old towers,  
Ships with red sails that crowd 'neath bridges grey,  
Ringing of bells, old gardens, with old flowers,  
Quaint roofs and spires, all far, O far away :  
And eyes, once happy, dimmed with sorrow-showers ;  
And one whose dear gold hair is turned to grey.

*Despair.*



## DESPAIR.

(*To —.*)

I LOVED you shyly first and half ashamed,  
As young things always love : a quietness,  
A patient dignity lay in your eyes ;  
And round your mouth a curious tenderness.

So did I love your soul : but after years  
Of loving that strange sweetness, that I knew  
Was your true self, I longed to kiss your lips,  
Your hands, your hair : I loved your body too.

But since you never loved me ; nor would lend  
Or soul or body, I watch the world of men  
Carelessly—this man's eyelids sometimes twitch ;  
And that man coughs a little now and then. . . .

## REPROOF.

(To —.)

THERE was a time when every word you said  
    Would have left its bruise, and stung my heart to flame,  
    To burn in agony : but now the same  
Fall like brown leaves on something cold and dead.  
Your blows strike full on my defenceless head,  
    But I must go on loving you ; no shame  
    Sends back the swift hot blood the way it came  
Along my veins—Not now ! Those days are fled,  
Hate me, if that shall make you think of me !  
    Curse me, if you remember me the while !  
Only I cannot brook forgetfulness ;  
    Your frown I welcome, having not your smile.  
I love you so, your very hate would be  
    A paradise, your loathing a caress.

## IN EXILE.

SOMETIMES the new day's music  
Plays such a pleasant strain,  
New voices and new laughter,  
That I forget my pain.

Deep as the mists of morning,  
Deep as the evening grey,  
So deep, and deeper hidden,  
The old love fades away.

Until like some far echo  
From lands beyond the morn,  
Dawn-red among the shadow,  
The old love is reborn.

Then like a magic sunrise  
That blinds the eastern foam,  
With torn and tortured music,  
The old love calls me home.

TO A. M.

*(Killed in Flanders.)*

TIME was in summer weather,  
By Cherwell's wandering streams,  
We loved to walk together  
To where the iris gleams.

Now in French fields are blowing  
Wild flowers about your hair ;  
And gentle streams are flowing ;  
But you no longer care.

## TWO WORLDS.

THE autumn night hung soft and still outside :

While from the fire, swift light and shadows flew  
Round the dark pictures on the walls . . . I sighed  
And looked into the fire, and looked at you.

There you sat silent in the fiery gloom

Your head just resting on the deep armchair  
And there were dreams and silence in the room . . .  
I watched the firelight making gold your hair.

And then my mind went backwards . . . and I saw

A grave, pale face a thousand miles away ;  
Dark, understanding eyes . . . no single flaw  
Marred its pale beauty. So my mind did stray

Back to those years 'twere better to forget . . .

Then someone coughed ; swore in undertone,  
And struck a match ; and lit a cigarette ;  
And put some ragtime on the gramophone.

## FARLINGTON MARSHES.

THE sun sets red o'er Farlington :  
The autumn light shines in the tree :  
As now from out the long grey marshes,  
The tide draws out to sea.

A clock in Portsmouth chimes the hour ;  
A little train runs whistling by ;  
But here is nothing else beyond  
The marshes and the sky.

And as the ocean draws the tide,  
I would the soul that bides in me  
Could follow the broad retreating wave,  
Out to the mother sea.

For as she rides beneath the moon,  
She in her soul a song doth keep :  
To sing to those whose hearts are tired  
And only wish for sleep.

## BEDTIME.

(To ——.)

THE glancing maze of light and sound  
That held me all the evening through,  
Laughter and voices by the fire,  
Are gone : and I come back to you.

I lie alone by candlelight,  
And watch the shadows on the walls ;  
The watch ticks loud : while from afar  
A distant engine whistle calls.

Now as of old you come to me ;  
Your pale face and watchful eyes  
Call to my heart, call to my blood,  
And cry to me as the bird cries.

O I am sick with thought of you !  
Ever by night you come this way  
And stoop above my bed : and yet  
You are a thousand miles away.

## THE LOST KINGDOMS.

IN the wooden hut,  
By the red warmth of the fire,  
In the dusk he sits and ponders  
Kingdoms of a lost desire.

Dreams of youth come back in plenty,  
Fancies vague and far away ;  
Distant towers, with ancient gateways,  
By a river old and grey ;

Winding streets and fairy casements ;  
Happy laughing lips and eyes ;  
While the Oxford bells are ringing  
Underneath the Oxford skies. . . .

In the wooden hut,  
By the red warmth of the fire,  
In the dusk he sits and ponders  
Kingdoms of a lost desire.

*Hope.*



## FLOWERS OF CLAY.

EVEN as the soaring bird desires the beauty of the sky—  
So my soul yearns for the beauty of heaven :  
But alas ! I cannot move ;  
My feet are deep embedded in the clay.

I see the heavenly vision in the clouds ;  
And I cry out,  
But my hands are stretched forth in vain,  
My tears are not heard :  
And behold ! the vision glorious passes by,  
And the skies are grey again.

And yet  
In my humility,  
Looking down,  
Out of the clay grow flowers !  
These I may handle,  
And plucking them may hide them in my bosom,  
For these are flowers of sorrow,  
By tears made beautiful.  
These I will gather silently,  
With bow'd head :  
And love shall cause them not to fade.

## TO THE ATHEISTS.

I KNOW that God will never let me die.

He is too passionate and intense for that.

See how He swings His great suns through the sky,

See how He hammers the proud-faced mountains flat.

He takes a handful of a million years

And hurls them at the planets ; or he throws

His red stars at the moon : then with hot tears

He stoops to kiss one little earthborn rose.

Don't nail God down to rules, and think you know !

Or God, Who sorrows all a summer's day

Because a blade of grass has died, will come

And suck this world up in His lips, and lo !

Will spit it out a pebble, powdered grey,

Into the whirl of Infinity's nothingless foam.

APRIL, 1915.

Now day by day, with labour oft unseen,  
    The year fights through to summer. Here and now  
    The pale bud slowly bursts the blackened bough,  
Casts off the husk, and stands up straight and green.  
Long, very long, the winter months have been ;  
    But God, with need of waiting, doth endow  
    His gift of patience, and would teach us how  
We too must pass through months of hardship lean,  
Waiting and striving, till with dauntless head  
    We stand to greet life's summer. Day by day,  
Often complaining, we are surely led  
    To greet a deathless beauty—what time they,  
Who have accomplished, the all glorious dead,  
    Shine forth like stars, and point us out the way.

## HOPE ETERNAL.

O FOOLISH heart, art thou still lingering  
Among dead hopes and vain imagining,  
That thou dost still desire another spring ?

See how the red woods now are withering !  
Listen to their unhappy murmuring !  
Yearly they fade. Yet thou dost long for spring ?

See how grave autumn with cold hands doth fling,  
In the dust, all summer's patient gathering !  
See, all are dead ! Yet thou dost long for spring ?

Vain, vain has been all thine old sorrowing.  
Nor all thy tears, nor all thy prayers can bring  
The old gods back. Yet thou dost long for spring !

They turn from thee, they scorn to hear thee sing,  
Thy dearest friends. Even love hath taken wing.  
Yet still, O heart, thou waitest for the spring !

## RECOMPENSE.

FOR little days of half-fulfilled delight,  
Small sorrows that half-hide the larger pain :  
Stray gleams of light in hours monotonous,  
We thank Thee not in vain.

We must not stop to think : someday, somehow  
We shall live out our dreams ; and in that wider land  
We shall forgive this earth and be forgiven ;  
*Then* shall we understand.

## THE UNEXPLAINABLE.

I WILL not let the light of every day  
Cast dust upon the rich gold of my dreams ;  
For while my heart with such strong impulse teems  
What care I for the words I cannot say ?  
Because I cannot tell you what they are  
Shall then my dreams become less real to me ?  
If I explain it not, must I not see  
The mystery being round one golden star ?  
I only know, that unto me the sky  
Is more than sky : and likewise all the land :  
So that I now have ceased to reason why,  
But call this something, beauty. God once planned  
A simple dreamer should be made to die  
For dreams the wise men could not understand.

## THE ETERNITY OF DAYLIGHT.

THE great sun shines alway : but we,  
In this earth's shadow, sometimes say  
" Now it is night," and cannot see,  
In darkness, the eternal day.

## DECEMBER, 1915.

IN the dark unkind wintry weather  
When rain falls from the sulky sky  
And all earth's ills are flung together  
In unharmonious harmony—

When the wet, soddened grass is crying  
Silently ; and the tall dark trees  
Stand in a group together sighing,  
At life's unutterable mysteries,

I do not miss you then, O dearests ;  
For in my heart a dead hope lies ;  
And all of you died then, O nearests ;  
With summer and with friendly skies.

But when with hope and memory burning,  
The pale sun lights the wintry plain ;  
Then in my heart pale hope returning  
Brings back the memory and the pain.





## THE GIFT.

HIS eyes are bright and eager, with the brightness of the sun,  
(England, he gives them you)

His hands are strong for climbing and his feet are swift to run,  
(England, he gives them you)

He has knowledge of the meadows, in the dreamy autumn  
days,

The brown hill, and the gold hill, and the green forgotten ways,  
(But he leaves them now for you)

There is a certain ancient city, where he once was free and  
young,

(But he leaves it now for you).

Where Oxford tales are spoken, and Oxford ways are sung,  
(But he leaves them now for you)

And his heart is often weary, for that dear old river shore,  
And he thinks a little sadly, of the days that come no more,  
(But he gives them up for you).

If his dust is one day lying, in an unfamiliar land,  
(England he went for you)

Oh, England, sometimes think of him, of thousands, only one,  
In the dawning, or the noonday, or the setting of the sun,  
(As once he thought of you).

For to him and many like him, there seemed no other way.

(England, he asked not why)

The giving up of all things, for ever and for aye,

(England, he asked not why)

And so he goes unshrinking, from those dearest paths of home,

For he knows, great hearted England, let whatever fate may  
come,

You will *never* let him die !

*Death.*



## ANIMA LUCIS.

THROUGH winding cavernous glooms in silence moves the  
stream

The sun hath long since fled, and the rocks stand gaunt and  
grey :

Dark grows the air and chill : a star begins to gleam :

And the night rides proudly down from the dim skies far  
away.

Night, thou hast conquered day, as death must conquer life :

The captive meek precedes thy slow triumphal car :

Shall *nothing* of her, then escape thy wrecking strife ?

—As darker grows the night, so brighter gleams the star !

“ The souls of saints that die are but sunbeams lifted higher.”

*Longfellow.*

## THE OLD MASTERS.

THE clever tricks of modern verse,  
With broken thought and broken line,  
And nervous art, that would dispense  
With the grand beauty and the fine  
Calm strength the older poets knew,  
How shall I find them true ?

How shall they help me as I go  
To meet man's old-accustomed foe ?  
What help is learned of selfish breath  
To pass the giant gates of Death ?

So must I turn  
For courage, faith, devotion, fearlessness,  
Back to an age when hearts of men did burn  
To a steady flame and to one impulse true :  
Simple and great they grew.  
Now unto me has come the one clear call ;  
Egotists, intellectuals, tricksters all,  
I take my leave of you.

## DEPARTURE.

No longer can I sit alone  
And dream the whole day through,  
Till out of loneliness have grown  
Some false thoughts and some true.

But I must up and disappear  
From scenes I used to know ;  
And open wide the door, my dear,  
And let the old dreams go.

Ah ! they will leave me,—they will fade,  
Like smoke upon the air :  
Who shall recall the songs I made,  
When I am no more there ?

And when the dust blows who shall guess  
What sorrows and what pain,  
And what wild dreams of tenderness,  
That dust did once contain ?

## WHEN I AM DEAD.

'TIS strange to think when I am dead,  
The sweet earth still will yield her store  
Of soft delights ; they will not cease  
Though I not see them as before.

Still, still on golden summer eves,  
The skies shall hold a dream divine ;  
And men shall love and man shall weep  
The joys and woes, that once were mine.

The little birds that softly call  
Among the shadows will not care :  
The happy lovers in the lane  
Shall never guess I once walked there.

And all the sorrows and regrets  
That clouded o'er my little day,  
And all the wild mistakes of love,  
Shall like a mist have passed away.

## A RETROSPECT.\*

SCATTER the flowers that once we plucked together,  
Unweave the garland that we two had made,  
Leave them to die—uncared for and forgotten,  
Leave them to fade.

If, as you pass them by, you see me kneeling  
Tearful, to kiss their ev'ry leaf and blade,  
Then will you know how hard it is, when love must  
Leave them to fade.

Long years may pass, and with them joy or sorrow,  
Death comes the end, when all our dues are paid,  
Deep in my heart I'll hide those flowers, and never  
Leave them to fade.

\* This song has been set to music by E. M. Routledge, and sung at the Bechstein Hall.

## DEATH.\*

SUDDENLY a great noise shall fill my ears,  
Like angry waters or the roar of men ;  
I shall be dizzy, faint, with many fears ;  
Blindly my hands shall clutch the air—and then

I shall be walking 'neath the quiet skies,  
In the familiar land of former years,  
Among familiar faces. I shall arise  
In that dear land where there are no more tears.

*\* Extract from a letter from the Officer Commanding B Company.*

"Your son was killed at about 2.50 p.m. on Monday, 24th January. He had gone to inspect a 'dug-out' which had been shelled. It was just beside the stretcher bearers' 'dug-out,' and he had been talking to them. Several shells came over, one of which struck him. From that moment he was dead, although he breathed a few times—no suffering."

## THE GARDEN OF DEATH.

Now the golden lads are lying  
Under the grass and under the sky ;  
Very soft the wind comes sighing,  
Ancient lullaby.

But I stole among the flowers  
To the place they said they were :  
Lo ! among the empty bowers,  
There was no one there.

\* \* \* \*

Then I turned and saw Thee,  
Where Thy feet did roam :  
Thou hadst been before me,  
Thou hadst led the children home.

## CHANGE.

SIGHT becomes thought ;  
Thought turns to song,  
Lasting for ever,  
Righting the wrong.

Dust grows to soul ;  
That, too, shall bide,  
In what new shape  
He will provide.

*Somewhere in France.*



I.

THE CAFÉ.

THIS evening I sat in the crowded café  
And, looking round,  
I saw the gilded ceiling and the mirrors upon the walls.  
The glaring lights shone down on the tall green palms ;  
And with dazzled eyes,  
As in a dream,  
I watched the waiters hurrying to and fro  
Among the many excited faces,  
Talking eagerly, across the little tables :  
And I stared long at the cigarette-ends on the sanded floor.

And then . . .  
I was back again in the country in England :  
And it was springtime.  
I felt the soft wind blowing down from the hills  
Full of the scent of the sweet wild flowers :  
And someone came out of the old house into the sunshine ;  
My mother was coming to me under the trees ;  
And the air was white with cherry-blossoms ;  
Happily, laughingly came she down the garden—  
There in England, in the Springtime,  
In the dear time of flowers,  
Her voice was calling me . . .

## II.

### THE MARCH.

WE were splashing along the muddy lanes :  
And as I walked behind the long column,  
I saw the men's shoulders swing to and fro ;  
And as they jolted along unevenly,  
Marching at ease,  
Their song came back to me on the wind ;  
And my heart sang with them.

When suddenly,  
As the wind will sometimes cease at twilight,  
Their song faded and died—

And then,  
Looking round,  
I saw, and in a glance understood—  
We were passing the little graves . . .  
Lonely and silent, I saw them side by side,  
In the little new-made grave-garden :  
There slept the soldiers of England ;  
There the heroes had found their peace.

### III.

#### THE STREAM NEAR THE BILLET.\*

THE little shy mysterious stream  
That through the ruined city flows,  
Still holds its ancient winding path,  
Still on its laughing way it goes.

No longer do the houses tall,  
Cast their broad shadow on its wave :  
At evening time, no longer now,  
It hears a music slow and grave,  
Float from the dim cathedral bells :  
No bright-eyed children run to find  
Their image mirrored there, or sail  
Their paper boats before the wind.

Those days are past ; instead, to-day  
A ruined heap the city lies,  
Of broken masonry and beam,  
Beneath the grey relentless skies.

\* This was written a few days before the author was killed.

And yet . . . the little stream runs on :  
Nor boastful gun nor ruthless sword,  
Nor any vicious form of death,  
Can stay the beauty of its word.

Onward it goes, content, alone,  
Whispering its music day by day ;  
Singing of freedom ; while it seeks  
The hidden meaning far away.

It does not pause or hesitate,  
It does not strive to understand  
The here and now ; but still pursues  
The quest, the far-off better land.

It does not see the broken Church,  
With scarce a stone still in its place ;  
But hurries on ; content to feel  
The sunlight warm upon its face.

It knows the present is not all,  
That in to-morrow it may find  
A joy more beautiful for tears,  
More sweet for what is left behind.

And so I watch it steal away  
Through the grey dusk. Beyond, afar,  
There lies the promise of the dawn,  
Enough till then, the Evening star.

#### IV.

### A CONFESSION OF TIREDNESS.

*(Found in a notebook.)*

COME, poets of a former age,  
And lend me magic how to sing  
The music of the things I see,  
The tidings that I have to bring.

For now my ears are deaf with noise,  
My legs for very tiredness shake,  
And by the guttering candle light,  
I cannot keep my eyes awake.

Not now, but afterwards, my lips  
Shall sing the music of the war,  
Meanwhile let other bards at home,  
Less tired than I, sing as before,

Majestic melodies of strife,  
Rich sounding as the thund'rous deep.  
This *poet* is a *soldier* now,  
My lords, I fear he's gone to sleep.

*Written in France,  
December 27th, 1915.*



# SOME OPINIONS ON THE QUEST OF BEAUTY

(Out of print : about to be reissued with *The Quest of Truth*  
in *The Collected Poems*.)

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*Dr. L. R. FARNELL, Rector of Exeter College, Oxford.*

I have read it [The Quest of Beauty], and with more real pleasure than I have read any of the published verse of young Oxford. I will not flatter you, and I have been an ardent life-long votary of poetry and a pretty stern critic.

*Sir W. A. RALEIGH.*

I remember getting your son's book of poems . . . and reading some of them, and liking them . . . The best poems in the world are not so good a gift as what he has given to his country. I saw the fine Sonnet in the *Times*. . . . Though nothing can dull the pain of parting, *there is exultation, too*, in thinking of him.

*THE TIMES.*

Short pieces by a young Oxonian, who reveals simple, gentle tastes, and is mainly occupied with love, dreams, joy, song, and other simple monosyllabic conceptions.

Occasionally he has a fine thought, as:—

'Beauty lies in sorrow, lovely as the snow  
Lying on a ruined town . . .'

And a neat and polished workmanship marks many of the pieces, such as the sonnet 'Love locked out,' or the little trifles called 'Songs' on pp. 30 and 31, which are by no means so easy to write as they seem.

*THE WESTERN MORNING NEWS.*

Mr. Freston's poems (one would guess to be) the work of an Oxford undergraduate who has gone to seek for different

experiences on French and Flemish soil, while his book, as he says, 'keeps the summer term' for him. If this be so, one may expect work of real merit from him later on, if he come happily home again, for the knack of versifying and a grace and freshness that pleases are there, though the themes handled are slight. A little poem by President Poincaré (translated from the French version), very happily rendered, will be noted with interest; and all lovers of Oxford will appreciate the two fine sonnets on that city. Mr. Freston is certainly best in his lyrics, some of which may be called Heinesque in their piquant simplicity.

#### THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

There is not a weak or worthless poem in Mr. Freston's collection which he calls *The Quest of Beauty*. There is no Wordsworthian simplicity, as in this :

GOD KNOWS.

So much sadness in the world !  
Is the pleasure worth the pain ?  
Are our efforts all in vain ?  
Who can know and who can say ?  
Little children—such are we !  
For the rest—it seems to me  
God must know, and surely He  
Will explain it all one day !

There is also the skill of the translator, as in the translation of President Poincaré's poem.

#### THE OXFORD CHRONICLE.

In communication, it does not need Mr. Rex Freston's throbbing sonnet on 'Romance' to tell us that he is the Romantic among our young poets :

Why mourn for Greece, in the white dust laid low ?  
We, too, can boast our cities tall and fair.  
Can those her marbles which ye treasure so  
With our sweet laughing eyes and lips compare ?  
Why turn for ever to the long ago ?  
Romance is still alive—for those who dare !

This little volume is warm with a tensely-felt emotion, and it is aroused by the romance which finds its definition in the first verse of the poets of all the centuries. In his quest of beauty Mr. Freston looks for it, and finds it, along the accepted paths—in nature and love, and man's proud heritage 'to dream, to do, and to endure'—but chiefly in the poets themselves, so that the dream-poem of 'The Passing of Beauty,' which leaves

One vast world-town of misery,  
With smoke uprising all the hours,

mirrors a preceding passing of the poets:—

I dreamed the poets, long abused  
And mocked and scoffed at, sang no more :  
No music sounded from their door :  
They who once begged, at last refused.  
Then every flower drooped its head,  
And all the sweet birds ceased to sing :  
No voice rose up to greet the spring,  
For all the poets now were dead.

And again:—

On nights when I am lonely  
I sit beside the sea,  
And the company of poets  
Come forth and sing to me.  
They come to me out of the wild dark waves—  
The night wind sets them free;  
And with voices mellow as golden bells,  
They sing their songs to me.

Mr. Freston has a happy art, as in 'The Letter,' of shutting into a little lyric of untrimmed simplicity a world of meaning, and his little volume is rich in lines of distinctive, swiftly-appealing imagery:—

I droop to sudden sorrow—till I feel your hands at last  
Softly cover and enfold me, like an overwhelming sea.  
Now at her frosted casement leans the moon,  
Held spellbound listening. . . .

I stood within the gates of paradise,  
And saw the flowering plain where heaven lies  
In deep content beside her foamless sea.

But 'June Evening,' with its rich and perfect picture of mid-summer, remains Mr. Freston's completest achievement and happiest promise. The two translations from the Persian which this verse includes are at the moment less interesting than an English rendering of a poem by President Poincaré inspired by 'Old Lorraine.'

*THE LYTHAM STANDARD.*

These poems have a simple charm entirely their own, and some of Mr. Freston's verse has come very near to perfect beauty. All his thoughts are worth the consideration of lovers of poetry, invariably written with much facility of expression, though occasionally without any great depth. Yet the author can touch those depths at times, as in the title poem, the Sonnet on p. 51, and 'Romance,' to mention only three. Many of the poems in this book are peculiarly adaptable for setting to music, and all are rhythmical. There are one or two translations from the Persian, and one from a poem by President Poincaré, 'In Old Lorraine.' Also when the poet writes of Oxford he has well caught the spirit of the place, and we wish he had given us more. In 'Challenge' he strongly recalls W. E. Henley's lines 'Invictus.'

In one poem, 'The Company of Poets,' he expresses what the present writer has often felt most vividly, that in certain moods the poets are present with him bringing their immortal balm, but they come to Mr. Freston up from the sea, which to many will seem an incongruous conceit.

One poem of only four lines is exquisite :

'Not only what you are,  
But all that you might be,  
Shall be my guiding star  
Throughout eternity.'

There are the themes of a thousand poems in these simple, great-souled lines, yet a thousand poems could not express more finely the ideal sacredness of love and life than the sincerity of these few words.

Some of Mr. Freston's verse appeared in '*Oxford Poetry*, 1914,' and from time to time we have noticed his contributions to *The Daily Mirror*, and are glad to see them reprinted. Last April a sonnet by him appeared in *The Times*. He is now a Lieutenant in the 3rd Royal Berkshire Regiment, and we venture to offer our good wishes for his poetical and military fortune, the life of thought and the life of action, between which there is often a vital link.

#### THE OXFORD MAGAZINE.

The name poem bears the marks of distinction and a strong feeling; other poems such as 'Requiem' and 'Marching Song' possess the same merits to a lesser degree, though they also are coupled with simplicity.

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### Extracts from Reviews of *Oxford Poetry* 1914.

#### THE TIMES.

To Mr. Freston falls this volume's one clear thrill of 'magic' in 'June Evening':—

By the dark shore of the streams  
Guelders lift their veiled light,  
And the sceptred iris gleams;  
While the dog-rose, softly bright,  
Folds unto herself an image  
Of the sunset's dreams. . . .

THE SHEFFIELD DAILY TELEGRAPH.

Selection from verse so uniformly good would seem invidious. With this reserve we may mention . . . 'June Evening.'

THE OXFORD CHRONICLE.

Mr. Freston, in 'June Evening,' has written a lyric of witchery, alternately deeply-rich and dimly-pale in its colour and haunting in its melody—

' . . . While the dog-rose, softly bright,  
Folds unto herself an image  
Of the sunset's dreams.'

There is the purest poetry this little volume holds. . . .

---

Extracts from Reviews of *Oxford Poetry 1915*.

THE ASIATIC REVIEW.

Where all have helped so well to produce a pretty 'Book of Song,' it seems hardly fair to use comparative terms in speaking of the work of the various contributors.

H. R. Freston's 'Sometimes I wonder' makes a very pretty poem :

' Sometimes I think you understand  
That, when the magic hour draws near,  
Suddenly I shall seize your hand,  
And kiss your lips and call you dear ;  
Sometimes I think you understand.'

THE TIMES.

Poetry is one of the inscrutable elements in mortal life. Mr. Freston in a line or two tinges his page with it :

' Beauty lies in sorrow, lovely as the snow  
Lying on a ruined town, that once was blithe and gay.'



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